

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
REMARKS, WITH PRESIDENT CLINTON, TO NAVY PERSONNEL
NORFOLK, VA
OCTOBER 6, 1994

SEC. PERRY: Thank you very much, Admiral Miller. This is my third visit to the Ike in the last four months. If I come back here again, I think I'm going to ask the skipper if he'll prepare my own berth for me on the ship.

The president and I just got briefed by Admiral Miller who gave us a status report on our operations in Haiti. We then had a video teleconference where the president spoke directly to General Shelton, General Meade and the other commanders in Haiti. They gave us their assessment of the mission in Haiti and their projections for the future. What we just heard confirms my impression that so far this has been one of the most flawlessly executed operations in American military history. The plan put together by Admiral Miller and his team was in a word brilliant. The logistics support was outstanding, the leadership was superb, and the military personnel who participated, including this team, are quite simply the best in the world.

The president and I both realize that it was your professionalism, dedication and training that made it happen. We also realize that besides working to restore democracy to Haiti, the crew members of the Ike were also rewriting military doctrine, using this powerful carrier to launch an infantry air assault, and you performed this unique mission without a single incident or casualties -- a superb job.

The president and I want you to know that we highly value the capability that ships like the Ike represent and are fully committed to maintaining a powerful fleet of nuclear carriers. We value your capabilities, your skills and your dedication. But we also appreciate the hardships that you've endured to carry out this Haiti mission, and we appreciate the additional hardship that you face as you get ready to deploy to the Med on October the 20th. America asks a lot of you and we are deeply impressed and thankful for your willingness to respond.

The president is here today to personally thank you, each of you, for the job well done, and by coming here, he wishes to show his appreciation to all of our service members who have worked to restore democracy in Haiti. We realize that much remains to be done there, but you have already accomplished a great deal. You can be proud of the job that you have done. (Applause.)

I can tell you that as your secretary, I am proud of you. Indeed, all of America is proud of you.

And now it is my distinct privilege to introduce you to your commander-in-chief, President Bill Clinton. (Applause.)

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you very much, Secretary Perry. Admiral Miller, Admiral Owens, Admiral Flannigan (sp), Admiral Murphy, Captain Gemel (sp), to all of you who are here, it's a great honor for me to be here. I asked to see the person responsible for decorating the F-14 with my name and the vice president's name there. I guess I'm going to have to take flying lessons.

ADM. : He's right here, Mr. President, Skipper Al Myers (sp).

PRESIDENT CLINTON: Thank you very much. I appreciate it. I told someone to take a picture of that, and I'm going to take it back to the vice president when I see him this afternoon and suggest that we both take flying lessons. (Laughter.) And Admiral Miller said, "You understand on that plane you would still control the eject seat." (Laughter.) And I told him I don't believe in ejecting, I'd never bail out, but I was glad to know that. (Laughter.)

I thank you all for your service. I'm pleased and honored to be with you today. I understand that some of you have actually chosen to come back from your leave to be a part of this ceremony, and I'm deeply grateful for yet another expression of your devotion to your country.

I am proud of the job you have done, proud of the great work that all of our troops are doing in Haiti. And on behalf of the American people, the most important message I have to you today is a simple, straightforward, heartfelt "Thank you." (Applause.)

I also want to thank especially Captain Gemel (sp) and the crew of this magnificent carrier for the "I Like Ike" button. You know, you might think that's funny because he was a Republican and I'm a Democrat, but when I was born President Truman was president, but obviously I was an infant, I didn't have much consciousness of it. President Eisenhower was elected in the year I went to the

first grade. So he was the first president I really ever knew anything about, and all of us regardless of our party, liked Ike. I can still remember when the country was united in a way that it's not now and when political arguments were a little more civil than they tend to be now. President Eisenhower's life of service to our country and his incredible leadership throughout his military career culminating in his leadership in World War II, and of course ultimately his election to the presidency was an inspiration to me and to every other young American and I know is a continuing inspiration to all of you who are privileged to serve on this great carrier and in this group.

Much has been asked of you, and you have delivered. Thanks to your efforts the Haitian people are moving from fear to freedom. Thanks to your efforts the democratically elected government will soon return to power. Thanks to your efforts the world knows that the United States will stand up for human rights and against slaughter, stand up for democracy, honor our commitments, and expect those who make commitments to us to honor them as well. We gave our word, and you, the men and women of the Eisenhower battle group, kept the word of the United States. And for that we are all in your debt. (Applause.)

The stories from Port-au-Prince and elsewhere in Haiti have inspired all Americans. We have seen the moving images of Haitians approaching and thanking American troops for their newfound freedom. We have seen the joy in their eyes and the hope in their faces. Operation Uphold Democracy is not over yet, and you know well that it still presents dangers to the men and women of our armed forces. But look what has happened in less than three weeks. In less than three weeks, you've disarmed FRAPH, the attaches, and the other militia who have terrorized thousands of Haitians. In less than three weeks you took heavy weapons away from the military and made the cities and the towns more secure. In less than three weeks you helped 1,900 refugees return home from Guantanamo, no longer afraid for their lives. In less than three weeks you permitted parliament to once again open its doors for business, and today they're having a good old fashioned debate down there about like what happens in Congress every day in Washington.

In less than three weeks, you returned Port-au-Prince Mayor Evans Paul, a man in hiding in his own country for three years, back to his office. In less than three weeks, you put state radio and television back into the hands of people who want democracy. In less than three weeks, you

even turned the lights back on in Cap-Haitien after two years of darkness. In less than three weeks, you showed the world what the men and women of the American military can do. (Applause.)

All of us owe these achievements to the fact that you are the best trained, best prepared, best equipped, most highly motivated fighting force in the world. Your reputation preceded you to Haiti. When the military rulers learned that you were on your way, they agreed to step down. The awesome force you represent is the steel in the sword of America's diplomacy.

The success of the mission in Haiti today also shows how flexible our military has become. Thanks to careful planning by the U.S. Atlantic Command and the Joint Task Force, we were able to quickly recall the massive assault force that was on its way. In its place and within just hours of reaching agreement with Mr. Cedras and the other military leaders, we sent in troops carried by the Eisenhower battle group to keep the peace in Haiti.

Operation Uphold Democracy demonstrates the value of mixing our four services together and drawing on the special capabilities of each of them — what Admiral Miller calls adaptive force packaging. You prepared the first ever infantry air assault from a carrier. Had it not been for such innovation, it would have taken many more hours, if not days, for our troops to be on the ground there. I salute Admiral Miller and the members of his staff who developed this innovative plan, which will change our military planning and make it possible for us to do remarkable things well into the 21st century. You have laid the groundwork for a dramatic forward movement in a military planning and execution. You should be proud and the nation owes Admiral Miller and his staff a great deal. (Applause.)

Of course, even the best strategists can only make a difference if they have the resources to do the job. That's why I was pleased yesterday to sign the Fiscal Year '95 Defense Authorization Bill which was passed with strong bipartisan support, including the support of Virginia's two fine Senators, Chuck Robb and John Warner, and the two able congressmen from this area, Norm Sisisky and Bobby Scott. This bill will assure that you remain better trained, better equipped and better prepared than any other military in the world, and I am determined that it will always be that way. I know — (applause.) Thank you. I know that one piece of this defense bill will be especially welcome news for all of you: The \$3.6 billion we will spend on a new aircraft carrier, CVN-76. (Applause.)

That carrier will be built right here in Norfolk by thousands of hardworking Virginians. Like the Eisenhower, it will give us the capability to project our power around the world, to support peacekeeping and humanitarian relief missions and if necessary, to fight and to win regional conflicts.

In two weeks — just two weeks — you set sail for the Adriatic to carry on your work of protecting our country's national interests around the world. I know you will demonstrate the same skill and professionalism on this journey that you have shown in Haiti. In a few moments, I'll have the distinct honor of presenting Navy Commendation Medals for Meritorious Service in Haiti to several of you, but I want every one of you to know that in my book, each and every one of you is a medal

winner, and example of what is the very best in our country. You serve with distinction, you serve in a selfless way, you serve in a way that will help us to build a peaceful and freer and stronger world for yourselves and your children as we move into the next century, and we are all in your debt. Men and women of the Ike, you have proved your capabilities time and again. In Haiti, you brought a new day to a people who thought they would never get it. You answered the call, you did the job. your country is proud of you.

Thank you, God bless you and God bless America. (Applause.)

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